

## OUR IDENTITY—ARE WE LOSING IT?

The church of Christ was generally restored in the 19<sup>th</sup> century with the guideline of “speak where the Bible speaks and remain silent where the Bible is silent”. That statement or guideline more or less represents our identity. It is a form of an elitist attitude generally saying we see what the Bible says, we follow what the Bible says, and you are putting your salvation at risk if you choose to do something else. We cannot judge someone else’s outcome on judgment day. However, our guideline would not allow us to give judgment day comfort to those who do not follow basic Biblical teachings.

Do not think it unusual that we have a guideline or motto for what we do. Everyone has a guideline. “I’m O.K., you’re O.K.” is a common guideline. About the only thing which offends the guideline is to suggest that someone else is not O.K. – which our guideline teaches us to at least imply.

Frequently, your greatest strength is also your greatest weakness. Our greatest strength has been the adherence to the guideline and it has kept the church of Christ as a reasonably homogenous group in spite of a lack of earthly hierarchy. On the other hand it has separated us from social acceptance with the rest of Christendom. As the rest of the world wants to be ecumenical and socially acceptable we have pretty much stood alone.

Our guideline automatically generates a negative reaction in most people, who consider it wrong not to be ecumenical. That makes it hard to be liked by most people in the world.

The church is presently drifting from our guideline. Some causes of this appear to be:

1. Prosperity: There seems to become a greater desire for social acceptability in proportion to prosperity.
2. The general “I’m O.K., you’re O.K.” attitude has been in vogue for a couple of generations and it is having more influence on the church than we are having on it.
3. As it has been unpopular to say things which would tend to proselyte others outside the church, we have in large part stopped teaching what would distinguish ourselves from others. This has resulted in a generation in which a progressively higher percentage of members and not well grounded or tested in basic Biblical teachings. With the new generations not well versed in the scriptures, when decisions are made they will be made on personal preferences rather than Biblical teachings. Decisions based on personal preferences will tend to drift from Biblical teachings.

When we drift to a more socially acceptable guideline, we have a handicap. Some of us may be willing to abandon basic Biblical teachings to become more inclusive, but we still have the reputation of following the Bible strictly. This appears to be enough of a problem to some congregations that they took “Church of Christ” off the sign.

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## OUR IDENTITY—ARE WE LOSING IT? (CONTINUED)

This makes for a quandary as to whether it is better for a congregation to stop following Biblical teachings and still call themselves a "Church of Christ" or to change their name. The first alternative has the problem of influencing other congregations, i.e. "one rotten apple spoils the basket". The second is an open door to further apostasy of the congregation in question.

For whatever reason, the Churches of Christ have lessened the teachings on "What must I do to be saved" in favor of more social gospel topics. Consider for yourself how long it has been since you have heard a sermon which couldn't be given at a Baptist or Methodist church.

At the opening chapel service at Abilene Christian University the local Methodist College President and local Baptist College President have been introduced as honored guests. ACU has been in business with the local Baptist and Methodist colleges in ownership and operation of a nursing school. Imagine that you introduce an ACU freshman to this and then tell him or her that they need to take the gospel to the Baptists and Methodists. Have we not traded evangelist zeal for social acceptance?

If it is not acceptable to proselyte the Baptists and Methodists, who are we to proselyte. The unchurched? Should we be concerned that we will offend the unchurched by implying that they are not OK?

There is no end to how far we can retreat from the basic guideline of "speak where the Bible speaks and remain silent where the Bible is silent". The question is why are we retreating at all. Does it not represent a subject of great importance?

Let us renew our commitment to the guideline as it is a commitment to the Bible and to Christ. We do no one a favor by not telling them the truth. We also do no one a favor by saying the truth harshly and repulsing them. We need to tell the truth with grace and concern for their souls.

### CHRISTMAS SHOPPING

**A woman was out Christmas shopping with her two children.**

**After many hours of looking at row after row of toys and everything else imaginable, and after hours of hearing both her children asking for everything they saw on those many shelves, she finally made it to the elevator with her two kids. She was feeling what so many of us feel during the holiday season, overwhelming pressure to go to every party, every housewarming, taste all the holiday food and treats, get that perfect gift for every single person on our shopping list, make sure we don't forget anyone on our card list, and the pressure of making sure we respond to everyone who sent us a card.**

**Finally the elevator doors opened, and there was already a crowd in the elevator. She pushed her way in and dragged her two kids in with her and all the shopping bags. When the doors closed, she couldn't take it anymore and stated, "Whoever started this whole Christmas thing should be found, strung up, and shot."**

**From the back, everyone heard a quiet, calm voice respond - - "Don't worry. We already crucified him."**

**For the rest of the trip down the elevator, it was so quiet you could have heard a pin drop.**

**Don't forget this year to keep the one who started "this whole Christmas thing" in your every thought, deed, purchase and word. If we all did it, just think how different this whole world could be.**

**GROWTH RATE OF YOUR SERVICE AREA**

The population changes in your congregations service area are a significant factor in determining the effectiveness of your evangelistic programs.

Identification of what your service area is can sometimes be a daunting task. Your members will be concentrated in some areas and some of them will be widely dispersed. There is overlapping of some areas by 2 or more congregations. Other areas are not served by any congregation (When you identify that, you have identified a mission field).

**ESTABLISH YOUR SERVICE AREA:**

The most practical way to quantify your service area is to select 1 or more zip codes which characterize your congregation. A primary reason for this method is that historical zip code population data is actually available. There will likely not be a precise zip code or set of zip codes which describes your congregation. There may be other congregations which share your zip codes. What you are looking for is a representative and objective indication of the growth rate of your service area.

**YOUR SERVICE AREA DATA:**

1. 1990: Go to <http://www.census.gov/cgi-bin/gazetteer> and enter the zip code(s) to get the population in you zip code(s) in 1990.
2. 2000: Go to <http://www.zip-codes.com/> and enter the zip codes to get the population in your zip code(s) in 2000.

**CALCULATE THE GROWTH RATE OF YOUR SERVICE AREA:**

Average annual growth rate =  $((2000 \text{ pop.} / 1990 \text{ pop.}) - 1) \times (100 / 10) \%$

If your 2000 population is 18,300 and your 1990 population is 15,000, then  $((18,300/15,000) - 1) \times (100/10) = 2.2\%$  population growth per year, average

Your service area representative zip codes: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Your service area 2000 population: \_\_\_\_\_

Your service area 1990 population: \_\_\_\_\_

Your service area growth rate is : \_\_\_\_\_%.

Notes:

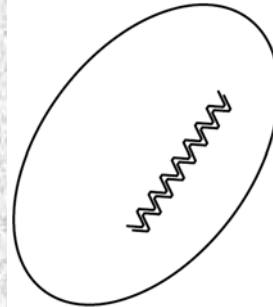
1. If you know of a better way to establish a congregation's service area, please send it to the e-mail address at the end of this newsletter and we will publish.

2. If you know of why one should not want to establish a congregation's basic service area, please send it to the e-mail address at the end of this newsletter and we will publish.

**IMPOSSIBLE FOR EVOLUTION: THE START OF LIFE**

General evolution teaches that lightning struck a primordial brew and started life. Sounds simple enough.

To get a feel for the reality of this belief, we want to discuss what are the minimum requirements of life? Although there are a number of other requirements, 5 basic characteristics which must happen in one place to have life.



REPRODUCE  
GET FOOD (MOVE)  
GET OXYGEN  
BURN FOOD  
DISPOSE OF WASTE

Can you be alive without any of these capabilities? The evolutionary lightning strike had to do all complex creations at one time for the "life" to survive. Do you believe that all these capabilities can happen because lightning strikes something? Wouldn't you think it more likely that lightning would kill something rather than bring it to life?

**Committed**

Are you smarter than the dumbest thing which ever lived? The dumbest thing ever supposedly figured out how to take food and chemically mix (burn) it with oxygen to produce energy. Do you know how to do that? It also figured out how to divide in half to reproduce. Can you figure out how to divide in half? It is not unlikely, it is impossible!

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## NEW SPANISH WORK IN SPRING BRANCH IN WEST HOUSTON

As of the first of the year, Jim Culpepper will be starting a new work in the Spring Branch area which will be focused on the Spanish speaking brethren (and future brethren and sisters). If you might be interested in helping in this work, contact Jim at Jim L. Culpepper & Associates, P. C., 9821 Katy Freeway, Suite 110, Houston, Texas 77024-1208, Telephone: 713-463-6300, Fax: 713-463-6301, or jim@culpepperlaw.com. Jim has been a leader in this work for many years and should be commended and supported in his new challenge.

A store front is being rented near the corner of Blalock and Long Point. The congregation is being started from scratch with song books and Bibles arranged. The following items are needed by this new congregation. If you have any of these items available or would like to provide monetary support for this new work, call Jim at the phone number listed above.

**ITEMS FOR KITCHEN:** Refrigerator, Ice Maker, Electric stove with top burners and oven below, 2 coffee pots that make 12-30 cups, 2 blenders, 2 microwave ovens, freezer, storage cabinets and shelving.

**ITEMS OR NURSERY:** Cribs, play pens, diaper changing station, rocking chairs, tables and chairs for little people, toys, storage cabinets, and shelving,

**ITEMS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE:** Large screen TV, DVD player, Lap top computer on which to play games.

### FILL-IN PREACHERS

We are starting a pilot program to co-ordinate fill-in preachers for various congregations in the greater Houston Area. The presumption is that there are some larger congregations who have more men willing to present an occasional sermon than opportunities exist, and there are some smaller congregations where more opportunities exist than speakers.

Visit [thearray.org](http://thearray.org) and click on FILL-IN PREACHERS to see if any of the speakers / topics are interesting to you, or if you would like to add a topic to the list.

If you want to add a topic, you need to indicate your name, home congregation, phone number, and 1 to 4 topics. Each title and description of a topic should be 15-30 words. Send the list to [info@thearray.org](mailto:info@thearray.org).

### ARTICLES NEEDED

Whereas we are interested in articles which support the themes of this newsletter and articles of general interest, we want to request articles which oppose these viewpoints. It is educational to be exposed to and understand various points of view.



## MONEY PAGE

### GUARANTEED CHURCH GROWTH

If your congregation does the following, BCE Publications guarantees that it will grow.

Poll your congregation three times at 6 months intervals with the following results:

- 50% of the members know who their elder is
- 50% of the members will say that a minister is their friend
- 50% of the members will say that they are uplifted by the song services
- 50% of the men will say that their input is considered before physical decisions are made
- 50% of the members will say they are an important part of the work
- 50% of the members will say they are aware of the goals of the congregation
- 50% of the members will say that they know what their part is in achieving your goals

**GUARANTEE:** For the first congregation which does this and does not grow by at least 10%, we will send \$1000 to the church related children's home of your choice in your name.

I have never met a person who said that if they did this their church would not grow. If your congregation is not growing, what have you got to lose? (Offer made since 2001)

### IMPOSSIBLE FOR EVOLUTION?

**We will offer \$100 to the first person who can explain how we could have violated the first law of thermodynamics and have come into existence without God.**

**We will offer \$100 to the first person who can explain how we could have violated the second law of thermodynamics and have existed forever without God.**

**(Offer first posted 8/08)**

### IMPOSSIBLE FOR EVOLUTION!

This publication continues (since 1991) to make a standing offer of \$100 to the first person who can give any reason (1 or more) as to why atheistic evolution is a better explanation for the universe and/or life than creation by God, The Father of Adam, Abraham, and Jesus; as revealed in the Bible.

We will also give you \$100 if we cannot give you 12 reasons why atheistic evolution is impossible as an explanation for our existence.

We will discuss this any place, any time, and in any forum.

(This offer has been made repeatedly since June of 1991 with no takers)

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**AREA WIDE ACTIVITIES**

Feb 7, 2009                      Sun Valley Rescheduled Reunion, 2:00 0 5:00 at Clear Lake Church of Christ, 938 El Dorado Blvd., Houston, TX 77062. Donation of \$5 per person Or \$20 per family is suggested. Call 281-486-9350 for questions.

Feb 27-28, 2009                Area Wide Men's Retreat, Camp Holy Wilde, New Caney, Texas

HoustonCofC is a Yahoo group hosted by Steve Sandifer [steve.sandifer@sbcglobal.net] for the purpose of communicating Houston area news among the brethren. It is open to any member of the church at no cost.

**The Christian Array Newsletter**

This newsletter will be sent to members of the church on a monthly basis as an attempt to promote area wide activities and church growth. If you do not want to receive this newsletter, send an e-mail to [info@thearray.org](mailto:info@thearray.org) and it will be stopped.

If you know of anyone who would like to receive this newsletter, send their e-mail addresses to [info@thearray.org](mailto:info@thearray.org). All past copies of the newsletter can be found on the website "thearray.org".

**E-MAIL ADDRESSES**

A goal of this newsletter is to develop a mailing list of as many members of the church as possible and to communicate church related information to as many members as possible. In that light, we would appreciate:

1. Your forwarding the church member e-mail addresses which you have.
2. Sending the directory of the congregation you attend or any other directories which you might have.
3. Give us an idea of how to collect church member e-mail addresses.

The Christian Array is dedicated to support the sustained scriptural growth of the churches of Christ. It is published by BCE Publications, a 501(c)(3) organization with Benton F. Baugh, Ph.D., P.E. as editor BCE is solely responsible for the content. Any announcements, requests for publication, or comments should be e-mailed to [info@thearray.org](mailto:info@thearray.org).